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Citizens Project: A History of the Organization

MAY 2005

The Making of Citizens Project

A Call for Action

During the early 1990s it became apparent that Colorado Springs was moving in a very conservative and close-minded direction. There was an awareness in the community that the town had made a name for itself as a place that supported anti-progressive ideas and discriminatory policies. At the start of the decade, issues concerning the school districts became visible as the basic civil liberties of students were threatened.

It was at this time that two citizens concerned with the problems present and decided to rally a voice for the other side.

The "Living Room" Meetings

In 1992 Citizens Project (CP) was developed as an idea in the home of Amy Divine and Doug Triggs. The organization began to take shape as they called their acquaintance, Richard Skorman to seek out others interested in speaking out against the right-wing leaders and policies of the city. This began the "living room" meetings of the original members of CP. These meeting, infamous now to CP history, were an indication to Divine and Triggs that there were other members of the community that shared their feelings.

Mission Statement

Citizens Project spotlights issues in the Pikes Peak region and mobilizes people to strengthen the traditional values of our nation: equal rights, individual freedoms, separation of church and state, civic engagement, and respect for diversity.

The Fine Arts Center

As the organization grew, they realized that it was time to move out of the living room and into an office in the downtown area. Early in 1993, CP leadership held a meeting at the Fine Arts Center. Though much lore surrounds this event, it remains the main emergence of CP into the community. It was standing room only and created a sense that the tide may change for what would be tolerated in the Springs.

Here to Stay

The organization was on its way to notoriety at city, state, and national levels for their work in the community. They provided an outlet for a more moderate view that would allow everyone to have a reasonable voice --and the people came. Over the last decade and a half CP has fought to educate and motivate the citizens of Colorado Springs and have succeeded in this attempt. Through the use of their newsletter, Freedom Watch, The Activist Network, advocacy and a message of pluralism, CP maintains its elite standing as a moderate voice responding to right-wing politics.

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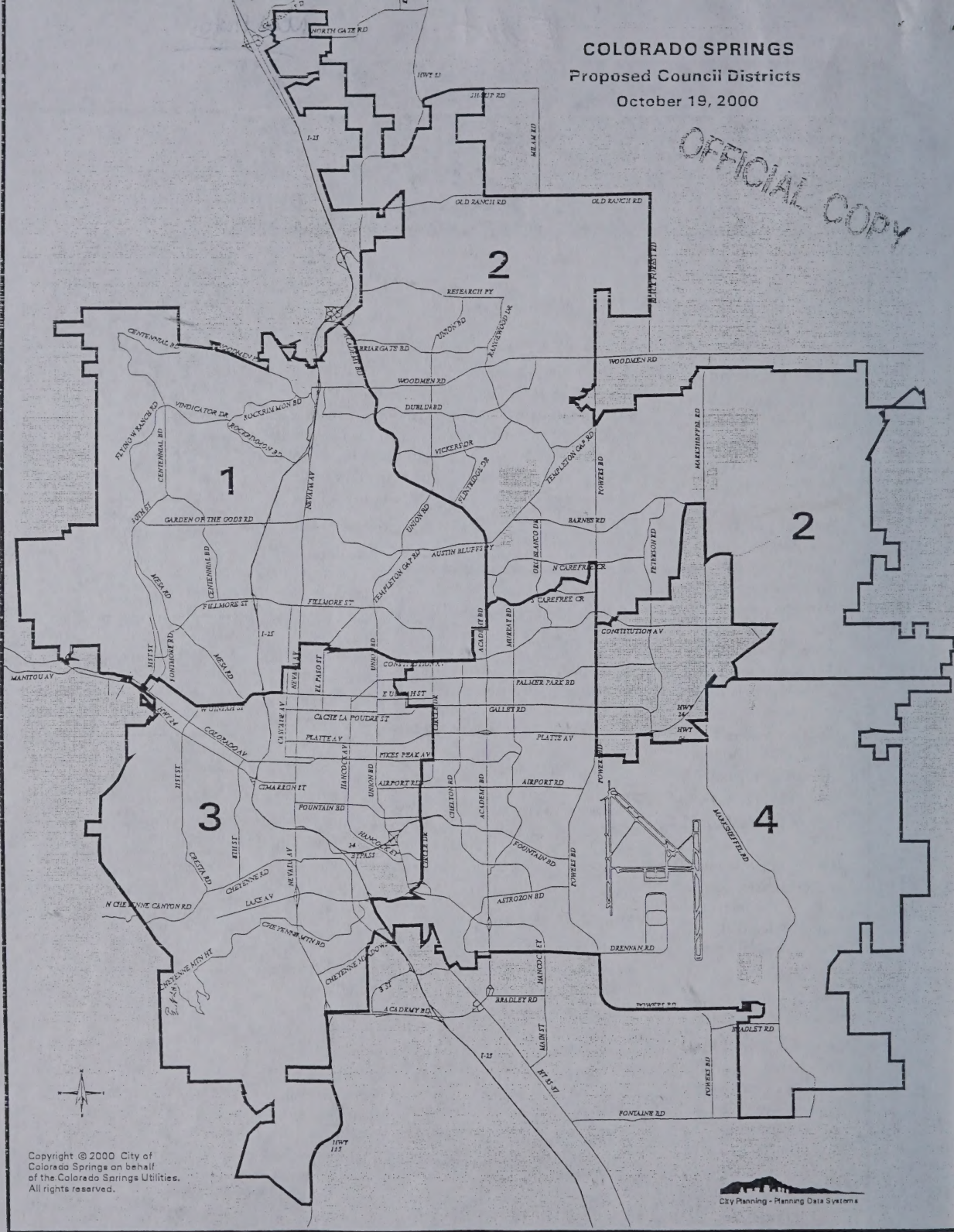
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Proposed Council Districts
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BLACK FOREST RD
CENTENNIAL BD
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UNION BD
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TEMPLETON GAP RD
POWERS BD
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The Fight Against Amendment 2

The Issue

Amendment 2, which threatened the civil rights of gays and lesbians, placed CP in the limelight of city politics and highlighted their work at a national level. Because CP was one of the first organizations to take a moderate view in the community, many looked to them to provide a much needed alternative view for the city and state.

> *... anything that was kind of anti-progressive, this town seemed to embrace and give birth to...Citizens Project tried to snuff out or impact the new wacky ideas that came along later and I think with some success*
>
> *-Greg Walta 04/05/05*

The Impact on CP

Although CP had focused on school issues, Amendment 2 established greater support and made the organization a target for political slandering. The right labeled CP as a gay and lesbian group despite their previous school board work in the community.

Though this issue was important to CP it was not the instigating factor for the organization's creation, nor was their mission built around this issue.

Working with Others

After the passage of Amendment 2 in 1992, CP and fellow organizations including Ground Zero worked hard to have the amendment shut down by the judicial system. After 4 years of hard work involving education, organizing, and mobilizing, in 1996 Amendment 2 was ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court.

The Mid to Late 90's

Here to Stay

After the defeat of Amendment 2, CP began to evolve from a grassroots organization to a more secure and planned out organization. Strategic plans concerning funding, board members, and political voice began to develop as the organization continued evolving as a non-profit.

Finding a New Voice

Various people stepped in to lead CP after Amy Divine began to step away from the organization's leading position. However none were long lasting or seemed to fit the direction of the organization and the vision of Divine. In 1995 Megan Day was hired as an office assistant. Though she did not come into the job as a director, she evolved into the position being the sole employee for the CP. Providing the organization the voice they had sought.

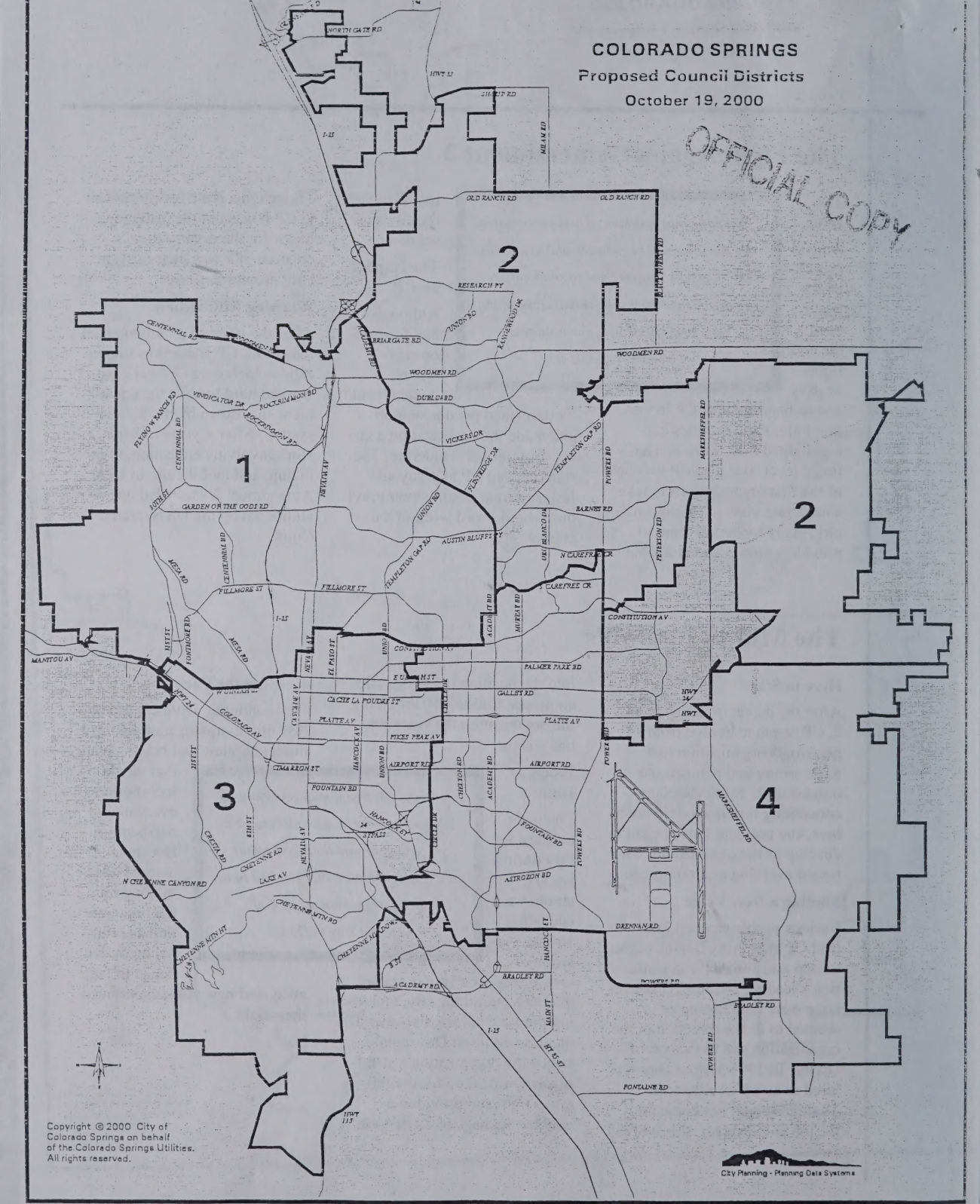
Issues at Hand

The main concern for Day during her six year tenure was education and the violation of civil rights occurring in school districts around the city, including the Parental Rights Amendment. In addition Day maintained the organization's standing as a watchdog for the religious right and provided a counter message to its rhetoric.

> *I always felt that it was important to educate and not be alarmist...to be a voice for fair and balanced public policy, local politics, etc. you had to act in a fair and balanced way*
>
> *-Megan Day 04/25/05*

Keeping the Pace

Day continued Divine's promotion of the organization taking a moderate view and being a place that would incorporate everyone's perspective. Her time marked a stabilizing for the organization as original members began to fade away and new voices continued their fight.



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Into the 21st Century

Continuing the Direction

In the start of the new century CP saw a change as Day stepped down and Greg Borom was promoted to director in 2001. Borom stayed with the organization until Dec. 2004. During his time as director Borom continued to strengthen the voice of diversity and pluralism that had been originated with Amy Divine and carried on by Megan Day.

New Faces, Same Message

In 2004 Borom added Barb Van Hoy to the staff as a Developmental Director, providing CP with an employee dedicated to fundraising and the financial well-being of the organization.

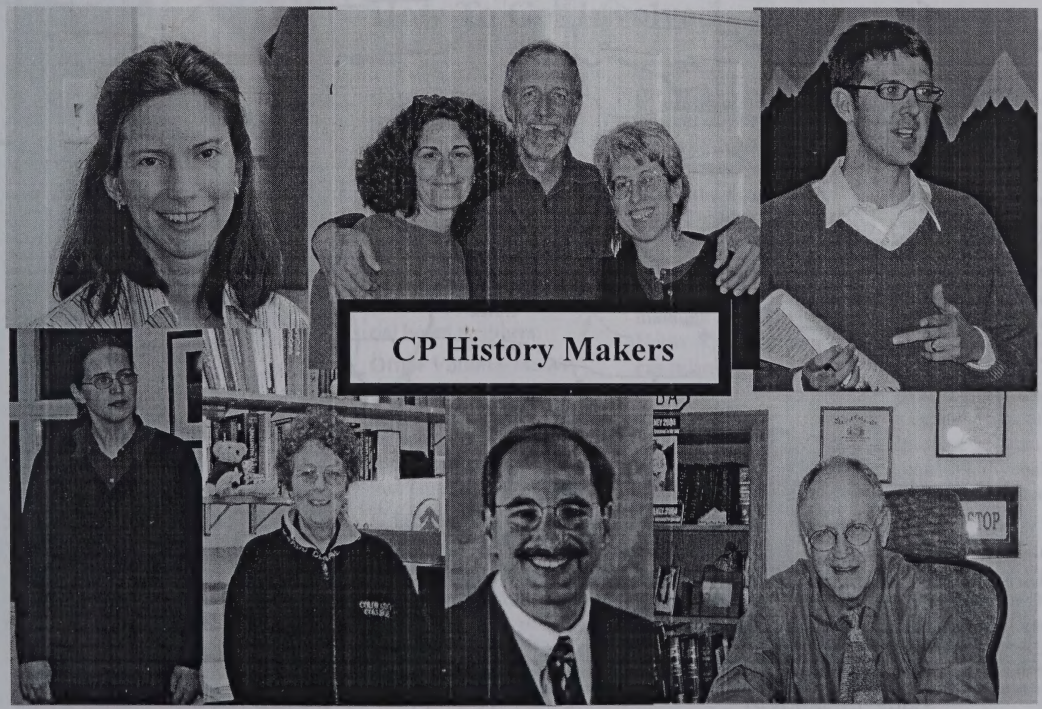
The line people kept saying over and over again was "I thought I was alone"

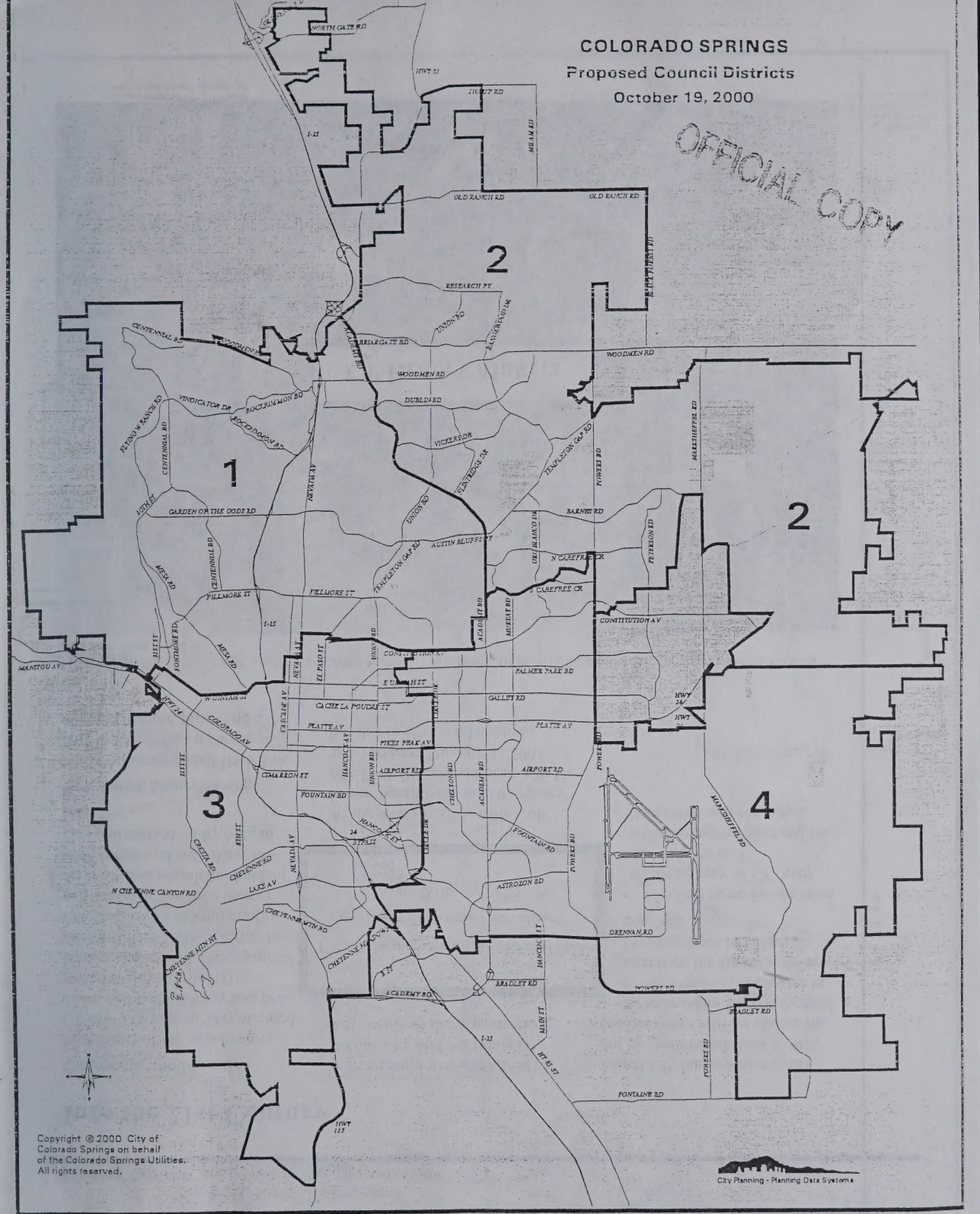
-Amy Divine 04/24/05

At the start of 2005, Ellie Collinson became the new director of CP. Collinson had been hired as a Program Director in 2001 but due to structural changes within CP, her position could not be maintained. Due to this, she became a natural choice for director when Borom stepped down. Despite the change in directors, the fight for diversity continues in voice, action, and spirit.

- To find more information on the history of CP, visit our website at www.citizensproject.org for interviews and timelines.

(Top) Megan Day, Amy Divine, Doug Triggs, Marj Webster, Greg Borom (Bottom) Ellie Collinson, Margie Duncombe, Richard Skorman, Greg Walta

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The Present of Citizens Project

Citizens Project's activity in the Springs remains consistent with events promoting a firm message of respect for diversity. Below is a list of current CP activities.

Mobilizing Activists
Activist Network moved State Senator Ed Jones to vote in favor of moving election reform legislation to the full House

Countering Hate
Helped organize a demonstration of nearly 1000 people in response to the hateful Westboro Baptist Church's pickets in Colorado Springs and organized an interfaith dialogue on tolerance that drew over 100 people and included a diverse panel of Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Humanist leaders.

Vision

We envision a Pikes Peak Community that is a vibrant democracy in which equal rights are protected, individual freedoms are secure, differences are respected, and people fully participate in civic and community life.

Promoting Civic Engagement
Published a Candidate Survey with responses from Colorado Springs City Council candidates and organized with the El Pomar Foundation a Candidate Forum

Preserving Separation of Church and State
Helped defeat a proposal by the D11 School Board to begin their meetings with a prayer

Coffee's with a Conscience
Bringing together community members to discuss pressing issues in our region

How To Get Involved

Volunteering
If you would like to volunteer please call 719-520-9899.

Freedom Watch Volunteers: We need help mailing and distribution on publication day as well as writers and editorial board members.

Office Volunteers: We need people to help clip newspaper articles, maintain our research library, and do a variety of "odd jobs" around the office.

Special Events Volunteers: We need help with special events like, candidate forums, the anniversary celebration, and booths at community

CP relies on the generous support of people like you who create community and celebrate diversity in the Pike Peak Region. Through the financial contributions of our 750 donors we are able to publish Freedom Watch, maintain our Activist Network, and sponsor candidate forums.

Citizens Project
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fx 719.520.0118
Info@CitizensProject.org

Activist Network
CP works to promote progressive public policy and defend existing policy that strengthens and expands equality, diversity, individual freedom, civic engagement, and separation of church and state. We focus on policy at the state, county, city, and local school board levels. CP's Activist Network consists of 550 people like you that support equality, diversity, and religious freedom.

Three Steps to Being a CP Activist:
1. Register to Vote
2. Know your District and Elected Leaders
3. Sign up for CP Activist

For more information on how to get involved and links to forms please visit our website at **www.citizensproject.org**

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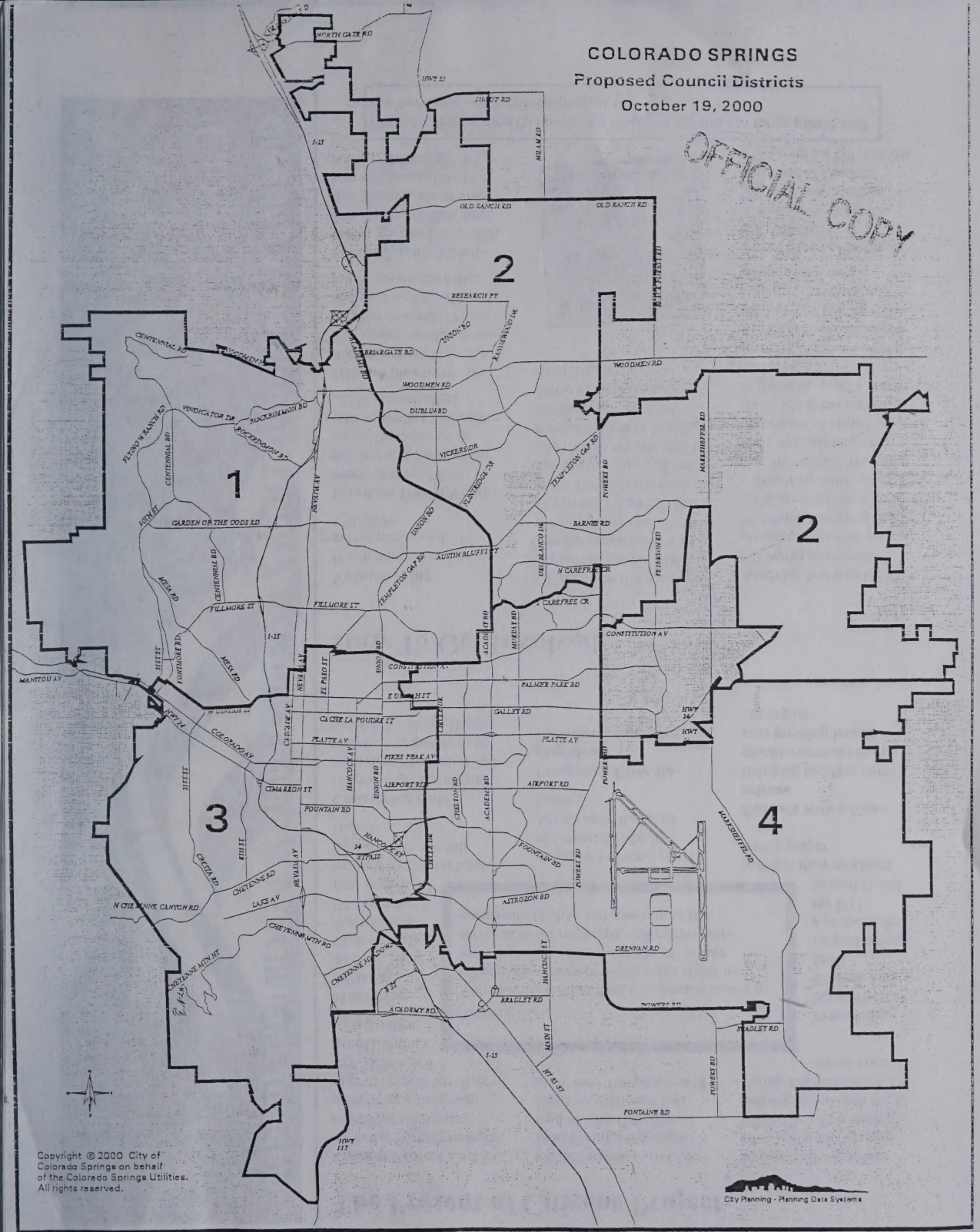

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